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Lively Arts — Comics — People

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The children and the killers at play in L.A.

There's a killer on the road
His brain is squirming like a toad.
Take a long holiday
Let your children play
If you give this man a ride
Sweet memory will die . . .
— The Doors, Riders on the Storm

It sprawls with cars, burger and taco stands, rows of stucco storefronts and houses: L.A., city of movie and music people, dark empty spaces and fluorescent signs. Songwriter Joni Mitchell called it the city of the fallen angels. JUAN RODRIGUEZ of The Gazette submerged himself in Lotusland West recently and came up with these impressions.

LOS ANGELES — The fluorescent plastic sign overlooking the parking lot announced "Live Recording Tonite. Bobby Blue Bland."

Here at the Coconut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel — a few hundred yards from the room where Bobby Kennedy was assassinated and a half mile from MacArthur Park — the great blues singer was taping an album, with a guest appearance by the great blues guitarist B.B. King.

The large dark room, with its rows of chrome-and-glass tables and chairs glinting in the haze of spotlights and cigarette smoke, was packed with expectant blacks and whites. A section was cordoned off for the media, with free liquor tickets for the invitees.

But, from the start, something was wrong. The band came on and cranked out some rusty chartis. Then Bobby Blue Bland, a large man, walked on stage in long strides — swaying. He was juiced. His phrases were unsure, he was groping for words.

The audience was still full of fevered exhortations, rising when B.B. King came out.

This seemed to set something off in Bobby, for throughout the set he would not give B.B. time to get in a solo.

Soon B.B.'s guitar, Lucille, went out of tune and King went sour. After much eyeto-eye sparring, King finally broke into The Thrill Is Gone, a thinly veiled admonishment to Bobby that broke into open bickering. The audience was pleading now — this was a recording, posterity beckoned.

After about 45 minutes, B.B. stepped and said, "Well, Bobby, we blew it."

Yeah, B.B., we blew it," said Bobby.

They walked off to a mixture of cheers and jeers. The band announcer bit down hard at the microphone: "Come back for the next show, folks — for more of the same." A fight broke out in the audience between a black and a white, causing drinks to spill, tables to fall and many of the media people to head for the exit.

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Los Angeles sprawls with cars, taco and burger stands, 24-hour supermarkets and rows of stucco storefronts and houses.

Apart from downtown, which is dark and empty at night, the area is spread out for miles along the coast and on either side of the Rocky Mountains. Foliage escalates in abundance in the higher class districts but palm trees stand everywhere in faded brown elegance.

In this city of music and movie people and corporation executives, a high premium job pays pookenpers who can make 100 grand a year to change the water and clean pools of bugs and dirt from the smog.

It was a dry winter but it rained for a week a while back and everyone got depressed. There are ads on the radio for depression cures. They have forest fires out here, too: from 30 miles away a foot of soot covered cars in Hollywood and turned the sky black. During the riots in Watts, some folks drove up the the Hollywood Hills, dropped acid and trained binoculars on the whole scene flaming miles away.

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His calling card, half black and half white on a unicorn theme, said "Goat Carson — Art" with phone numbers in Texas, L.A., and New York.

Goat had performed at the Palomino country music club on talent night three weeks running and he had advised that a videotape recording of his "farewell" performance would be screened at his place.

An address on Freemont Drive was typed out on the back of the card. It turned out to be a private road, guarded by a police patrol car behind a gate. The cop flashed a light at our licence plate, jotted it down, eyechecked the car's occupants, and said that the Carson residence was the one behind two white stone lions. "You can't miss it."

We drove slowly along the gently curved road, the leaves of the trees rustling in the darkness in front of the mansions.

It was a large white Spanish-style place, with curved arches. The doorway was unlit but the thick front door was half open.

Upstairs in a small carpeted room, Goat and half a dozen others were watching videotape recordings on a large screen. Turned out Goat was screenwriter Kit Carson's brother — and descendent of the outlaw Carson — and Kit was married to actress Karen Black. Both were away. Kit with some heavy writing: "He's been working on the screenplay for The Moviegoer for 10 years," drawled Goat; and Karen on a film for Scientology: ("Yeah, she's been into that stuff for a long time . . .").

The Goat and a small silent Texan friend called Pappo had moved in to do some redecorating.

He brought in a pitcher of dry martinis. The Goat had disheveled dark hair, a stubbly beard, a glint in his eyes, black chinos that fell down his ass, and dark brown kneeboots with heel taps. His taped Palomino performance was a fleeting bit of avant-gardism — jumping up and down in front of a bemused pick-up band, continuously shouting "Do you feel alright?!". The act had a totality and Goat knew it.

More martinis followed, as well as tapes of the Eagles, Stones, the last Beatles concert in Tokyo 1966, and the piece de resistance, Nixon's resignation speech — with the camera rolling for a full 10 minutes beforehand, revealing the President falling apart ("Is my collar sticking out?" etc.).

Laughs and amazement all around. The hours drifted by — more martinos, more marijuana, more tapes of Kennyloa Harris and Linda Ronstadt, and murmurings of Sal Mineo's murder ("I won't tell you what I know," said Goat). He offered the use of the jacuzzi and sauna — the pool had been buried in favor of lawn.

In the small hours of the morning, the Goat was watching the late shows on the big screen, switching channels instantly whenever a fellow Texan, Cal Worthington "the world's largest used car dealer" came on.

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A thin drizzle prevailed as car jockeys shuffled the parade of Mercedes and Cadillacs and foreign sports jobs in front of a Beverly Hills restaurant for a midnight press party for the rising British rock group Queen.

The hard record company was Elektra Asylum ("home of the Eagles, Joni Mitchell, Doors, etc.) and near the front door was its new president, Joe Smith — having arrived via a power shit in the Warner Bros. conglomerate — greeting celebrities, executives and media types. They were out in force.

There was Rodney Bingenheimer, the frail-looking bucktoothed hanger-on who got into all those photos with topless types and rock stars; now he's down to playing records at The Starwood (the main teenage rock club) and doing a gossip column (Hollywood Confidential) for Phonograph Record magazine. He had arrived early so as not to miss anyone and he stood in the middle of the floor swaying in the breeze of passersby.

Rod Stewart was there, sitting next to actress Susan George while Britt Ekland turned at another table, eventually walking out in a huff.

Tony Romark, the godfather of pop music in Montreal, was there — part of his two-week quest to sell his new tapes. "I'm gonna hafta come back and spend a few months playing golf and tennis with these people," he said.

There was Tom Dowd, the veteran disc producer (of old rhythm 'n' blues and the famed Eric Clapton "Layla album) who twinkled behind a grey elfin beard and noiseless specs. We asked him how old he was. "I'm 50!" he burst out laughing. "Can you believe it?!" And he immediately launched into an enthusiastic reminiscence of how he got Clapton and the late guitarist Duane Allman together. "Oh how I love to work with young talents!"

Long John Baldry, mentor in the 1960s for the Stones, Stewart, Faces, et al, lurched by. He was as tall and as thin as ever, he wore a light sea green suit and white fedora, and he was very pale. He slumped into a chair near the hat check and nodded off. When a clutch of journalists mentioned his name nearby, Baldry instinctively jerked his head and lit a cigarette in one motion, gazing into oblivion.

Outside, a young woman who claimed to be "the next Patti Smith" was off around the corner for a toke in the car of one of the party's security men, who was taking off his tie on the cool damp street.

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The season's theatrical hits in Los Angeles: Jon "Midnight Cowboy" Voigt as Hamlet, and Leonard "Startrek" Nimoy in the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

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Dinner with two queen bee rock publicists in Laurel Canyon, where rock stars live secluded in the woods off the road but still close to the allnight supermarkets that sprout out of nowhere. Inside the condominium-style apartment, with a view of trees and plant life, it was cushioned and comforting. Patty served beef bourguignon, potatoes, wine. A few joints preceded the meal and followed it, too, along with the mousse.

Patty and Bobbie have been in the business half their lives. They were with the legendary publicity firm, Gibson & Stromberg (which is now no more, due to co-rained self-destruction). Patty went out with her own company and it flopped. Bobbie joined a record company and that didn't pan out.

They went through a period of reflection, coming to the conclusion that they missed promoting rock acts. So they went back. "I'm rilly glad, cause I'm working with groups I rilly like, such as Kiss, Hamilton, Frank & Reynolds, the O'Jays . . ."

On a corner coffee table stood ornamental bookends holding up one book, Hollywood Confidential, by Eve Babitz. Eve is the original Hollywood High School rock 'n' roll girl who went on to design album covers.

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On the beach, Venice Beach, the old beatnik hangout. Remnants, in the form of a few psychedelic (so-cult?) bookshops and health food joints, are part of the seafront ragged with new highrise developments and crumbling stucco. Venice is also the weightlifting capital of the world (Mr. Universe comes from here) and along the beach are weight stands where muscular men work out, alongside the beach bums in the basketball and paddle tennis courts. A junkie beats on a drum in the hazy sun, a drunk tries to cadge his guitar for 10 bucks at the liquor store. Everyone (beach poets, beach philosophers, beach lovers) has his scene in the lazy afternoon.

Later that night on the car radio, a live broadcast from the Roxy Theatre by Kingfish, a new group led by the Grateful Dead's Bob Weir.

Over a background of fevered applause, the radio announcer's voice was charged: "Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, this band has all the excitement of the early Grateful Dead! People have taken off their clothes here tonight! In fact, at this moment I can see many people naked to the waist!"

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One of the Manson girls arrived in court wearing nun's robes that had been smuggled into jail. The judge warned her that she'd hurt her case if she continued to wear them. She eventually removed her headdress but continued to wear the robe, claiming it to be part of the Manson religious uniform.

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Goat had phoned, inviting us along to the Paramount movie lot to inspect a soundstage being built for a film in which he plays the killer.

We arrived at the Carson spread around 1 on a Saturday afternoon: the Goat and menagerie had just arisen. Cassette tapes and equipment were strewn about the floor of the TV room.

Goat stumbled down to the kitchen to retrieve the half-filled pitcher of rancid martins he had prepared a couple of nights earlier. Photos of Goat in action at the Palomino were on the kitchen table amongst the blow torches and the empty vodka bottles; they had evidently photocopied them and doctored them with stars, dots and scrawled in white paint, "Savage Star."

While he was getting ready, he gave us some photos of a home tatooing session they had recently, when they etched death masks on their arms. Our departure was delayed while Goat searched for a missing cassette tape, which turned out to be under the ashtray.

Inside a Paramount hangar, a cutaway Victorian mansion was being hammered together. 90 per cent of the film, entitled Roar, the alligator's answer to Jaws, would be shot here. The supervisor of this activity was a tanned stocky man wearing gulf-type clothes, Marshall Reade, who informed, "I've done just about everything there is to do in a movie — direct, produce, stage management, set design. You may remember a television detective series in the 1950s called The Line-Up — I was the third lead in that."

The current task was to build a tunnel under the house so that when the movie's helpless little girl crawls inside for safety, the villain sends in an alligator after her. The Goat gurgles, "I can hardly wait for that."

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If you give this man a ride
Sweet memory will die . . .
Riders in the storm . . .

Truce in Quebec rock rivalry should help everyone

Rock & Pop
by Juan Rodriguez

One of the major problems in the development of rock groups in Quebec has been the lack of good managers.

Few, if any, have had the foresight to direct careers within international contests (as well as keeping acts busy at home); many have existed for shortlived successes. As a result, it is perennial struggle to keep a rock group going, let alone get it off the ground.

This, the amalgamation of three managers into one production company to take care of all the affairs of three groups — the first time "rival" rock groups have united in Quebec — comes as welcome news.

The outfit is called La Maine, in honor of its St. Laurent Blvd. location, and the groups represented are Offenbach, Maneige and Octobre. The managers are Francine Loyer Hershorn, Jean Jacques Beauchamp and Dominique Brunet, with Ginette Lafleur taking care of bookings for all the groups.

The four La Maine people work in an old loft, near Prince Arthur St., with a new white paint job offsetting the antique-farmhouse furniture and the potted plants. A few clippings and photos are tacked on the walls, but nothing ostentatious. This is a place where the people are busy at work, with as few distractions as possible, on their groups.

The concept seems to be working. Offenbach has become the most consistent road band on the provincial circuit, while new recordings by Maneige and Octobre have consolidated their reputation as "progressive-rock" devotees.

Recently the three groups got together, after much cajoling, for a joint photo session with their managers. It was the first time many of the musicians had met each other socially but by the end of what became a party, the musical egos of three distinct groups took a back seat to musical fraternity.

That is indication enough of La Maine's early successful efforts — in the past, rock groups were so badly run that the only thing musicians had to do was bitch at each other. La Maine may well show them a better time.

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Question: What is the most popular French act (from France) to perform in Quebec?

Answer: Michel Fugain et le Big Bazar.

Who? Fugain, his wife Stephanie, their two-year-old daughter, and 23 others sing, play and cavort their way through a musical-theatrical revue that's caught the fancy of Montrealers.

Their upcoming engagement at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier from May 31 to June 21 will be seen by 70,000 people, and then there is a tour that will take the revue to Matane, Baie Comeau, Quebec (at the Grand Theatre from June 25 to July 14), Ottawa, Granby, Sherbrooke, Chicoutimi, Shawinigan and Rimouski.

Le Big Bazar blends a light new-Brazilian sound with comic-book, fantastical sketches, accompanied by splashes of lights and crazy costuming.

There is fairytale theatre and Le Big Bazar has evidently found a fairytale fiefdom in which to flourish.

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